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CIA chief defends using reporters in operations

From Wire Services

Washington—The CIA's director, Adm. Stansfield Turner, yesterday defended the administration policy of using American foreign correspondents for secret operations and said that in three separate instances he had personally approved such plans.

Members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, who are meeting here this week, disagreed sharply with his defense of the practice, arguing that it not only cast doubt on the professional ethics of correspondents but put them in danger.

In none of the instances Admiral Turner cited, however, did the plan materialize, and the journalists were not used, he said. Admiral Turner said no journalists are currently working for the Central Intelligence Agency.

"We fully share the recognition that journalism, religion and academia have a special importance to our country," Admiral Turner said. "At the same time, we recognize that there may be unusual circumstances in which an individual who is also a member of one of those professions may be used as an agent."

Admiral Turner said he changed CIA policy 1977 to allow the use of journalists, shortly after the Carter administration took office. In 1974, central intelligence director George Bush, in the midst of a public outcry, banned the use of American journalists.

Representative Les Aspin (D, Wis.), chairman of the subcommittee on oversight of the House Intelligence Committee, and Representative Edward Boland (D, Mass.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, both have reviewed the specific cases Admiral Turner cited and said that he had not violated CIA regulations by approving the use of the three as agents. Mr. Aspin said that one of them was a nonjournalist employed by an American news organization and that the other two were part-time journalists not currently employed by American news or-

ganizations.

The use of journalists as intelligence agents has long been a sensitive subject. Intelligence agencies point out that American journalists are valued as operatives because they can move about freely and ask questions without arousing suspicion and usually have developed good sources within foreign governments.

But most news organizations are adamantly opposed to the use of journalists as agents. They say it violates the traditional independence of the press from government and makes it difficult for other journalists to retain the trust of their sources. They point out that in a country like Iran the possibility that a foreign correspondent was a CIA agent certainly would endanger his or her life.

Admiral Turner said that there were now no American journalists actively employed or paid either here or abroad as agents of the CIA. He said he had no current plans to use or hire any but that, in what he called "very exceptional situations, I wouldn't hesitate" to recruit one.

Admiral Turner said he would not bar an agent using a journalist's cover if the situation demanded it. He said that, in a terrorist situation, for example, the only way to get to the terrorist might be to pose as journalists.